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ABSTRACT

This booklet examines the components of aesthetic education, reviews some of the current school programs in the arts, and points out some of the needs for improving aesthetic education in the schools. The purpose of aesthetic education is to help students experience the joy of beauty. To develop a program of aesthetic education, the stages of aesthetic development that a person goes through must be taken into consideration. Although individuals of the same age may be at different stages of development, all experience three facets of aesthetic awareness. They are performer, appreciator, and critic. These three stages provide a framework for developing a program of aesthetic education, no matter what the subject area the learner is studying. Through the work of various funding agencies, both public and private, many programs are now having an impact on the arts in the schools. For example, CEMREL, one of the regional educational laboratories located in St. Louis, has contributed a long-range curriculum development program for the arts in the elementary grades. The Utica School District in New York has instituted a pilot project called SEARCH in which film makers and poets worked both as artists in residence and as learning resources to teachers. If schools are to contribute to improving the quality of life of students, more attention must be given to the preparation of teachers in aesthetic education. (Author/RM)

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Aesthetic Education and the Quality of Life

By Thomas E. Curtis

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Series Editor, Derek L. Burleson

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Aesthetic Expression and the Quality of Life 6

The Arts in Society and Education 8

The Process of Aesthetic Development 11

Programs in the Arts: Schools That Work 14

Educating Teachers in Aesthetics 21

A Balanced Curriculum in the Arts 22

Bibliography 26

Aesthetic Expression and the Quality of Life

Nothing is more useful than this art which has no use.
—Ovid

A search for beauty characterizes all cultures. Whether expressed by a wicker basket or a bronze statue, a "crazy-work" quilt or an impressionistic painting, all cultures have demonstrated this continuing need for creative expression. Throughout history this search for beauty has contributed to a culture's quality of life. For some, aesthetic expression becomes a career; for most, it becomes a leisure-time pursuit. But for all, it determines how their particular environment is experienced.

Aesthetic criteria that determine the quality of life will vary from individual to individual, but most involve aspects of how one interacts with one's environment. For example, an individual finds satisfaction in a vocation that has pleasant surroundings. In today's society, aesthetic criteria are becoming more and more a factor in vocational selection. Further, with increasing aesthetic sensitivity, people are developing a new awareness of the relationship between the environment and the quality of life.

What part does aesthetic education play in improving the quality of life? If beauty is meant to enhance the environment, then it must be understood to be appreciated. If beauty is meant to be joyful, then individuals must learn to experience joy. To experience the joy of beauty, then, is the purpose of aesthetic education in the schools.

In addition, the opportunities to experience joy are greater in an aesthetic environment. Motivation is enhanced because of students'

desire to experience this joy. This striving for beauty, both in the environment and within the individual, is the basic premise for aesthetic education in the curriculum. Not only should the various arts receive special attention in the curriculum, they should also permeate the total curriculum in order to help students understand that beauty exists in all aspects of life. Along with basic skills, liberal education, and vocational preparation, aesthetic education must have an important role in the lives of students.

In the final analysis, if education is to contribute to improving the quality of life in our culture, then the curriculum must include a strong arts component. In this fastback I shall examine the components of aesthetic education, review some of the current school programs in the arts, and point out some of the needs for improving aesthetic education in our schools.

7

The Arts in Society and Education

I must study politics and war so that my sons may have liberty—liberty to study mathematics and philosophy, geography, natural history, naval architecture, navigation, commerce and agriculture; in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture. . . .

—John Adams

Definitions of quality of life have varied throughout history and these definitions changed as the culture changed. For example, in the Middle Ages the quality of life tended to center around basic life-sustaining functions, such as growing food. But even in those times, various art forms existed—in religious art, in plays performed by roaming actors, and in the songs of the troubadors. The tedium of eking out a living was relieved by Holy Days when the common folk could turn to matters not absolutely essential to life sustenance. However, in a period when times were grim, the quality of life, of necessity, was determined largely by the tasks of basic sustenance.

At the present time the U.S. is experiencing a cultural renaissance the equal of any in history. Only twice in the previous history of Western culture, during the Golden Age of Greece and the northern Italian Renaissance, has there been such an outburst of aesthetic activity. The Industrial Revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has provided the leisure time that has made possible the aesthetic revolution in the twentieth century and hopefully the twenty-first century.

Public opinion in the U.S. supports increased emphasis in the arts both in communities and in schools. For example, a 1974 Louis Harris

poll reported that more adults attended cultural events than attended spectator sports events. In this same poll 69% agreed that arts are very important to the quality of life, and 58% agreed that cultural facilities were very important to business and the economy. Another indication of societal concern for the arts was that 9 out of 10 believed that museums, theaters, and musical performances make a community a better place in which to live; and almost as many said that more performances should be made available.

In addition to the concern expressed for extending the arts in the community, this poll also investigated the arts needs of youths in schools. For example, 9 out of 10 thought that children should have an exposure to the arts; 61% of the parents of late teenagers thought their children should have more opportunities to attend arts events; and 4 out of 5 said that art courses should be funded from the regular school budget. When asked about specific arts activities, an overwhelming number stated that most arts activities should be required. More than three-quarters, for example, insisted that playing a musical instrument, writing stories or poems, drawing, painting, sculpting, and singing should be taught in the secondary schools for credit rather than as an extracurricular activity.

Another aspect of the U.S. cultural experience, based more upon observation than statistics, is that not only are more Americans involved as spectators at cultural events, but more are actively participating in such events. One metropolitan area recently surveyed indicated the presence of 43 community drama groups. Almost every church has its amateur choir, while most communities have one or more amateur choruses. The town band is an American Institution. While many more statistics and examples could be given, those presented should suffice to indicate that Americans are currently involved in more artistic activities, attending more cultural events, and are more concerned with arts than ever before in our history.

If schools are a mirror of the culture, then an increase in emphasis upon aesthetics will undoubtedly occur during the next several years. However, some problems cloud the generally rosy picture of the aesthetics activities in this country presented above. Cuts in schools budgets, a cry for "back-to-basics," demands for more rigorous aca-

demic standards—all are factors that might deter the progress of aesthetic education in our schools. Fortunately, funds from sources other than local school boards are becoming available through federal and state educational agencies and private foundations to support programs in the arts.

As we enter into the post-industrial era, people will have more leisure time in which to enjoy and participate in aesthetic activities. Demographic studies show that the number of older citizens is increasing. These people, many of whom are retired, provide a large clientele for involvement in the arts. Thus, a tremendous increase in demand for the arts may be expected within the next few decades as the numbers in this older group increase.

However, although more leisure time is now available to more people than ever before, there is still a major segment of the population which is poor and does not have the funds to participate in cultural activities. The poor *need* to experience beauty in its many aspects. Indeed, some have contended that it is the desire of the poor for a "good life" that has created much of the societal unrest of the last 10 to 15 years. While it is not my purpose here to argue that such a simplistic solution as the availability of more aesthetic opportunities will lessen societal discontent, certainly, in the name of justice, the arts, which the affluent can afford, the disadvantaged should be accorded.

Equally distressing is that while many are affluent and have leisure time, there is much dissatisfaction in the lives of many people. People with spare time do little of worth with it. With exposure to and participation in the arts, these people could achieve, over a period of time, greater self-awareness and cultural well-being.

In a society where technology has created a service-oriented economy and more leisure time, we could well become a nation of artists. In such a society there would be increasing emphasis on developing peoples' perception and sensibilities. Under these conditions the creation and appreciation of beauty would become a priority in improving the quality of life.

The Process of Aesthetic Development

We are down to the fundamental formulas of life, in the individual and society, and there we find our aesthetic principle residing.

—*Herbert Read*

To develop a program of aesthetic education, we must take into consideration the stages of aesthetic development. As individuals progress through childhood and adolescence, they exhibit stages of aesthetic expression and impression, not only in the traditional arts disciplines but in all areas of school and life. Individuals of the same age may be at different stages of development but they all experience these facets of aesthetic awareness. They are 1) performer, 2) appreciator, and 3) critic. These three stages provide a framework for developing a program of aesthetic education, no matter what the subject area the learner is studying.

Performer. Performing, no matter what the area, is a basic form of expression in the arts. The child who sings a nursery rhyme or the painter who creates a surrealistic work are both expressing themselves by performing. One of the basic goals in aesthetic education is to have opportunities to express oneself at a level of sophistication that is commensurate with one's personal needs, desires, and ability. One might sing in a chorus, paint by the numbers, perform bit parts in a play, take photographs on trips—all of these are relatively simple modes of expression which are, nevertheless, quite satisfying. Most individuals can be expressive at this level in one or more of the arts.

As individuals become more deeply involved in any of the arts, they strive for a more sophisticated level of expression: by singing in the local oratorio society, by painting for public exhibitions, or by per-

forming a lead role in community dramatic productions, among others. The primary difference between these and the more elementary levels of expression is the degree of personal commitment given to the quality of the performance.

At the first level, performing is primarily for the sake of enjoyment by the performer; only the most talented have a deep personal commitment to more mature levels of expression. Most programs in the elementary and secondary schools operate at this first level on the assumption that a broad exposure to performing in the various arts will create interest in and enjoyment of aesthetic experiences by all students. Those with special interests and talents will be encouraged to move to more sophisticated levels of performance.

However, to consider artistic expression through performance alone is too narrow a perspective. The singer with a beautiful voice, who is unable or unwilling to listen closely (i.e. receiving impressions), is at a serious disadvantage in attempting to become a true artist. To be creative in any art form requires that there be impression before there can be expression. Further, the attention to impression and expression should be extended to all areas of life and school curriculum, not just the conventional areas of aesthetic education. The middle school youngster building a bookshelf needs to be aware of the value of a geometrically pleasing design in his construction. A student preparing a dish in a home economics class needs to be aware of how spices can enhance the taste and of how decorations can make the dish more appetizing. These, too, are dimensions of quality of life that reflect a deep-felt expression by the performer (producer) in whatever field.

Appreciator. Appreciation, utilizing Harry Broudy's phrase, is "enlightened cherishing." It implies that appreciation involves both the emotions and the intellect. Without both there can be no appreciation. For students to become appreciators—the second facet of aesthetic development—requires that the school create opportunities for both emotional and intellectual responses to beauty in its various manifestations and to provide experiences in a valuing process that will give students a basis for accepting beauty and the arts as an integral part of their lives. Such valuing, if carried into adult life, could create a different type of culture than the one we currently know.

To appreciate is to perceive intellectually and emotionally that which is around us. To appreciate requires that an individual receive impressions from the surroundings holistically rather than through the intellect alone. It is not enough simply to be knowledgeable about musical form or about a particular composer's work; to appreciate, one should have an emotional response to musical expression as well. Appreciation can extend to a beautiful sunset, the graceful logic of an algebra problem, as well as to the delightful rendering of a Schubert sonata. To attempt to place a value on any of these experiences, or to judge one against the other is fruitless. Each must be weighed against the ineffable "rightness" inherent in the emotional response it evokes.

In order to appreciate, an individual needs to have experiences with a variety of aesthetic areas. Out of such experiences, the individual will develop criteria, either intellectual or emotional, for evaluating those areas.

Critic. Criticism, involving both analysis and synthesis, is the most cognitively sophisticated of the three facets of aesthetic development. Along with impression and expression, criticism involves the additional task of judging the quality of artistic phenomenon. The act of criticism presumes a knowledge of the phenomenon being perceived and of the criteria used to determine its excellence. Thus, in the field of fine art the critic should be aware of the history of the art work, the purpose of the artist, the personal factors in the artist's life that may have affected the creation of the art work; and certainly the critic must have an emotional reaction to the ideas expressed in the art work. Without such knowledge the act of criticism is meaningless. Just as a physicist who does not know Einstein's work is not qualified to speak of relativity, so an art critic who is not knowledgeable about the work of Picasso is not qualified to speak concerning modern art. Through exposure to many kinds of aesthetic experiences, students become aware of the fundamentals of criticism. They know that certain sounds and sights are considered more worthwhile than others, even though they cannot always articulate the reasons why. At a more profound level a critic is able to derive pleasure from the analytical skills involved in judging the quality of a work of art and at the same time can respond emotionally to it.

Programs in the Arts: Schools That Work

Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts, the book of their deeds, the book of their words and the book of their art. Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others, but of the three the only trustworthy one is the last.

—*John Ruskin*

The prospects for aesthetic education in our schools are encouraging since the larger American culture is stronger in the arts than ever before. Through the work of various funding agencies, both public and private, many programs are now having an impact on the arts in our schools. These efforts, some of which are described in this section, have created a receptive atmosphere.

Private funding agencies. One factor contributing to the increasing emphasis on the arts in American culture is the ever-expanding funds being disbursed by various private agencies to both community and school arts programs. An example is the John D. Rockefeller, III, Fund. This organization has developed a comprehensive arts education curriculum by utilizing community arts resources, by strengthening individual arts education components, and by developing interdisciplinary arts programs. In carrying out its programs the Fund has worked primarily with the League of Cities for the Arts in Education (six large city school districts) and with the Ad Hoc Coalition of States for the Arts in Education. This latter organization is

a loosely knit group representing the state education departments of nine states whose efforts are coordinated by the Fund. While not expending large amounts of money, the John D. Rockefeller, III, Fund has been extremely influential through the leadership it has provided and through the intense interest in the arts it has generated in the various cities and states involved in its projects. This is only one group concerned with aesthetic education, among many, that are available to educators seeking to improve the arts in their schools.

Government funding. Even more indicative of wide support for the arts is the increasing funding from federal and state agencies. Three of the more influential ones are: the Alliance for Arts Education, the education component of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., which is supported by the Center and the United States Department of Education; the Central Midwestern Regional Educational Laboratory (CEMREL), sponsored by the National Institute of Education of the Department of Education; and the Artists-in-Schools Program, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Alliance for Arts Education was established in 1973 for the purpose of strengthening arts education on a national level. One of its first projects was the development of state committees composed of individuals from the arts and art education. It was the first congressionally sanctioned program for arts education in federal legislative history. In addition to the establishment of state committees, the organization gives grants to state and local education agencies to develop arts programs as an integral part of the curriculum. Perhaps the major contribution of the Alliance has been its efforts to develop a partnership between performing artists and arts educators at state and local levels.

Another important federally funded agency working in arts education is CEMREL, one of the regional educational laboratories located in St. Louis, which is partially supported by the National Institute of Education, Department of Education. CEMREL's important contribution is its long-range curriculum development program in the arts for the elementary grades. A similar program for middle school grades is under consideration. In order to implement such a broad curriculum development program, CEMREL has co-sponsored teacher

training programs with local education agencies in 11 centers throughout the nation. CEMREL is the one federally-funded agency that gives its primary attention to the development of an arts curriculum. In recent years research has begun to assume a larger place in its program, but curriculum development still remains the primary emphasis.

The federally funded program that may have had the greatest impact on the arts curriculum in individual schools is the Artists-in-Schools Program. (See fastback 113 *Artists as Teachers*) Beginning in 1970, this program, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, has been available in every state and is designed to give professional artists an opportunity to work in elementary and secondary schools in their disciplines. Almost every type of artist has participated in this program at one time or another. Poets, painters, craftsmen, musicians, photographers, dancers, and many others have worked in elementary and secondary schools for varying periods of time. Their role is to demonstrate their particular discipline with the assumption that pupils will derive a valuable experience from watching an artist at work. At present more than 7,500 schools a year throughout all 50 states are using this resource.

The decade of the Seventies saw support from private, federal, and state agencies for the development of various programs in aesthetic education. These beginnings, while meager, are nevertheless good omens for aesthetic education for the rest of the century.

Aesthetic Education in the Schools

In order to understand the general condition of aesthetic education in the schools, let us consider three areas. The first area is the general arts classes that are offered to or required of all pupils. Using music as an example, this might include classes in singing, rudimentary instrumental playing, listening to music, and an introduction to music composition and history. The second area is performance, which might include experiences in visual art and design, vocal and instrumental music performance, acting, dancing, and creative writing. The third area is the aesthetic atmosphere of the total school environment—the classroom, the school building, and the school grounds.

General arts classes. Aesthetic education begins in the general arts

classes in elementary school. Although, in the last few years budget restrictions have cut the numbers of music and art specialists working directly with children, recent efforts in curriculum development in the arts and support from foundations, professional associations, and arts specialists from higher education have encouraged many innovative programs in the general arts areas. There is a recognition that the arts should be an essential part of the school experience for all students.

The backbone of the elementary school aesthetics education program has always been based on cooperation between the arts specialist and the classroom teacher. The music and/or art specialist brings a wealth of knowledge and techniques that benefit both the students and the classroom teacher, but the specialist can never be a substitute for an aesthetically oriented elementary classroom teacher who works with students six hours a day.

In the elementary grades in a few school districts there are some innovative aesthetic education programs that can serve as models for the rest of the nation. The Birmingham, Alabama, Public Schools, with the cooperation of the Junior League of Birmingham, the federal government, and some corporate funding, has developed a pilot Arts in Education program at Lakeview Elementary School. This exemplary program has been reported in *Arts in Education Partners*. The Lakeview program attempts to integrate the arts into all areas of the curriculum through the use of community artists in the school and through field trips. The Alabama School of Fine Arts has cooperated by offering special instruction in instrumental playing, dance, and creative dramatics.

The Utica School District in New York has instituted a pilot project called SEARCH (Search for Education through the Arts, Related Content, and the Humanities), which is sponsored by the New York State Education Department. In workshops teachers developed many units, which were published as models for use by other teachers. Film makers and poets worked both as artists-in-residence and as learning resources to the teachers.

Another successful arts program reported in *Coming to Our Senses* is the Cultural Arts Program developed by the Goleta Union School District in California. This district sponsored a series of inservice work-

shops for teachers with the cooperation of local artists, which culminated in the formation of a Teachers' Council for the Arts. Student workshops in music and drama and the Artists-in-Schools Dance Program have developed as a result of this teacher involvement in curriculum development in the arts.

In secondary schools general arts classes are less common, since required courses usually end in the middle school. More typical in secondary schools are a few elective courses plus strong programs in performing arts. In a few states, such as New York, there is emphasis on having arts courses as a possible elective area, but in schools that have no formal arts courses, a few mini-courses are sometimes offered in modern music, guitar, and other areas of immediate interest to the students.

One innovative secondary school approach is the separate program or sub-school such as that offered by Quincy II High School in Quincy, Illinois. Here seven separate mini-schools, ranging from the traditional academic high school to an extremely flexible fine arts school, are available to students. The idea of a fine arts high school is becoming increasingly popular in school districts that are large enough to support such a separate program.

Pocatello High School in Idaho has moved in a different direction by offering arts-oriented electives within the framework of the traditional subject matter. For example, it offers mini-courses within the framework of its English program (e.g., folk rock poetry and television investigation). An unusual program in Salt Lake City provides dance instruction in the various high schools. This is possible through the cooperation of the University of Utah, which has a strong teacher training program in dance. Such courses as history and theory of dance, dance production, and individual practice sessions are available in this praiseworthy program, which is reported in *Coming to Our Senses.*

Performance. With recent retrenchment because of budget cuts, many arts positions in the elementary schools have been cut or the specialists have been reassigned. Consequently, student performance opportunities in the elementary school have been curtailed. In some schools dedicated classroom teachers, who want their students to have the aesthetic experience of performing, have assumed these responsi-

bilities with excellent results. But these are exceptions. Arts specialists are important, not only for their individual expertise but for the continuity they can give to a program in which all students will receive some aesthetic experiences through performing.

Performance at the middle school level is uneven, with some aspects of the arts nonexistent, while others are extremely well done. When this age level has had good preparation in the elementary school, their musical performances can be quite good. But in other areas, such as dance and theater, there are far fewer opportunities for performance.

Performance levels in the arts in the secondary school vary greatly. Some high schools have art galleries filled with student art and present theatrical and music performances at a near-professional level. Other secondary school arts programs range from poor to nonexistent. In many cases the quality of the performance seems to depend more on the talent and dedication of individual teachers than on a strong arts curriculum.

Special note should be made of individual schools in the performing arts. Many such schools could be listed, but the High School of Performing Arts in New York city is exemplary. This school, founded in 1949, has through the last three decades trained hundreds of young artists, while at the same time providing them with a sound general education. Recently, several larger school districts have developed plans for separate schools in the performing arts for those students with special talent.

One area of current interest in arts education is the statewide summer school of the arts for selected young artists in different disciplines. New York State is one of the pioneers in this development, having recently established summer schools for dance, chorus, orchestra, and other arts areas. Talented students come together during the summer and work under the direction of a professional artist, who instills artistic rigor and inspires them to perform at the highest level of which they are capable.

Aesthetic environment in the schools. Schools are institutions but they need not look institutional. If schools are serious about aesthetic education, then they should themselves reflect an aesthetic environment. Current trends throughout the country seem to be moving in this

direction, whether in school buildings, landscaping, or in the community at large.

Many schools create an aesthetic environment by using corridor walls and classroom bulletin boards for exhibiting both student and commercial art, by piping music through the halls, and by posting announcements of cultural events in the community. In both physical education and dramatics classes teachers are emphasizing dance as an aesthetic experience as well as a physical conditioning activity. More local artists are being invited into schools to share their creations. These are only a few of the ways in which schools are surrounding students with an aesthetic environment.

Similarly, many communities are becoming much more conscious of their total aesthetic environment. Many cities are refurbishing their downtown areas; and individuals are renovating older homes with architectural merit. The "re-greening" or uban America in many metropolitan areas is another example of communities striving to enhance the aesthetic environment, as is the painting of wall murals on urban buildings, which enlivens the once drab surroundings and creates a sense of pride in the people who live nearby. The profusion of trees, flowers, and grassy areas creates a sense of beauty in the minds of all members of the community.

Communicating the idea that beauty exists not only in the works of artists but is also present in our surroundings is an important goal of aesthetic education in our schools.

Educating Teachers in Aesthetics

We demand . . . a method of education that is formally and fundamentally aesthetic . . .

—Herbert Read

If our schools are to contribute to improving the quality of life of students, then much more attention must be given to the preparation of teachers in the area of aesthetic education. In addition, continuing in-service experiences can provide the needed knowledge and skills for integrating aesthetic experiences into the curriculum.

Preservice education for those who are preparing to become teachers in the arts areas should provide the knowledge and skills that will enable them to integrate their particular discipline into other subjects in the curriculum. Utilizing art and music in the history class or in the language arts class are examples of this. At the same time, those who plan to teach language arts, science, and other subjects should receive some formal instruction in how the arts can enrich their special subject matter. Such training at the preservice level would not only enrich the lives of prospective teachers but would also help them to bring an aesthetic orientation to the curriculum once they begin teaching.

21

A Balanced Curriculum in the Arts

. . . Americans have available to them the resources, both of mind and matter, to build and support the finest culture the world has ever known . . .

—Melvin Tumin

The basic premise of this fastback is that if the school is to contribute to the quality of life, it must help students to acquire a sense of beauty and to understand the standards that determine beauty. This is the purpose of aesthetic education.

A balanced curriculum in the arts should be part of general education for all. Such a curriculum assumes that the learner will be involved in three roles in relation to the arts in later life—performer, appreciator, and critic. A brief review of these three areas of aesthetic development in school arts programs is included here as a point of departure for recommendations for aesthetic education in our schools.

Performance in the various arts is probably the strongest aspect of most school arts programs, especially in music and art. In some schools the theater arts are strong. But there is less attention given to dance and creative writing. In the elementary and middle schools most children have performance opportunities for singing, many for performing with musical instruments, and a smaller number for appearing in dramatic productions.

By the time pupils reach secondary school and college, the emphasis upon performance becomes much more rigorous and competitive. Many states have contests in music and theater to determine the best performing groups, ensembles, or soloists. Many colleges and universities have earned national reputations for their marching

bands, symphony orchestras, semi-professional theater productions, and art exhibits.

The performance dimension of the arts is unquestionably the most heavily supported aspect of arts education in the U.S. Some might argue that it is overstressed, particularly in secondary and higher education. Nevertheless, Americans can be proud of the performance levels achieved by many schools, both large and small. However, there could be a better balance between the expression and impression aspects of aesthetic education.

The appreciatory aspect of the arts receives some attention in the curriculum. Elementary and middle schools offer some basic experiences in music and art appreciation, as do most colleges and adult education centers. Some secondary schools offer music and art appreciation and history courses as electives. While enrollment in such courses is not large, they do provide an opportunity for young people to perceive and experience artistic works at their own level of sophistication. School-community cooperation provides additional appreciation experiences through visits to art galleries and by attending local drama productions and musical concerts.

It is in the arts criticism aspect of aesthetic education that American schools are probably the weakest. It could be argued that it is not necessary to be able to criticize a performance in order to enjoy it. However, since criticism is the most sophisticated level of aesthetic development, it cannot be ignored in the total aesthetic education program. The individual who perceives art but is unable to evaluate it or the musical performer who plays well but doesn't understand what he is trying to express are both ill-equipped to profit fully from the aesthetic experience. The skills of criticism are basic and necessary components in aesthetic development.

It is difficult to pinpoint at what developmental stage the skills of artistic criticism evolve. Elitists in the arts would contend that until a person has a broad and profound knowledge of a field, criticism is not possible. Yet, when a kindergartener comments that the drum beat in a particular piece of music is too loud, he is making a critical judgment. Combining previous experience with his intellect, this kindergartener is making a qualitative judgment of an artistic work. Criticism, then,

23

should be an intrinsic aspect of aesthetic education from elementary school through higher education.

Recommendations for a Balanced Arts Curriculum

A balanced curriculum in aesthetic education must provide experiences for students in their roles as performers, appreciators, and critics. Such experiences can occur within the broad general educational framework of the school and within specific arts education areas. The following recommendations, while not intended to be exhaustive, suggest ways that can enhance the quality of life through aesthetic education.

1. *Schools should reflect an environment conducive to aesthetic development.* Understanding and learning standards of taste can occur best within an aesthetic setting. The architecture of the school and such simple matters as maintaining clean floors and walls create an environment in which all can experience joy as they are involved in the learning process. Every classroom should be a place of beauty so that every individual, whether child, adolescent, or adult, can see that beauty is important in everyday life.

2. *Teacher education programs should give more emphasis to the integration of arts into general education.* Special arts teachers should be trained in more than one arts field in order that they can work with classroom teachers in elementary, middle, and secondary schools. Regular classroom teachers should receive some experiences in the arts in their teacher preparation programs in order to integrate various arts areas into the curriculum with the support of specialists. In addition, all teachers should be sensitized to the importance of the broader aesthetic aspects of the learning environment.

3. *The schools should increase their efforts to coordinate formal and continuing aesthetic education in the community.* A committee composed of school personnel, arts representatives, and other interested persons could be established to survey the community for human and physical resources that could contribute to the aesthetic educational program. The school should permit outside groups to use its facilities for communitywide arts programs. Local artists should be invited to participate in school and community efforts in the arts.

4. *Performance opportunities should be provided for those individuals who are less capable.* The purpose of performing is not only to express oneself but to perceive and appreciate various art forms. Yet most performance opportunities are currently given to those who are more talented. There should be increased opportunities for less capable individuals, who would better understand and appreciate the art form by performing it. Thus, middle school youngsters who are not polished instrumentalists should have some opportunity to perform in a band, which will help them become better perceivers of the performances of others.

5. *There should be more emphasis on the impression (perception) aspects of aesthetics in schools.* Since a far greater percentage of adults enjoy the arts as perceivers rather than as performers, more attention in aesthetic education programs should be given to developing abilities of perception. Such emphasis does not preclude a continued concern for performance, since much perception comes through performing.

6. *If students are to become critics of the arts as well as performers and appreciators, more emphasis must be given to teaching the criteria for evaluating and analyzing the various arts.* This aspect of aesthetic education is highly cognitive in nature and provides the foundation for raising the cultural level of our society.

These basic recommendations for aesthetic education, if followed, could result in a balanced school arts program. They are well within the realm of possibility; in fact, some of them are currently taking place in many areas of the country. The challenge now is to extend them, to improve the quality of life for all the nation.

25

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